

The coiled springs of the golden Sarn grass, healthy and full of life slowed them. Waves of the curling plant snagged at their clothes and gear and here and there was so dense as to trip them up. In the distance the low mournful bellow of wandering Chubbs, their massive bulks like feathered hillocks on the plains visible even at such a great distance. But such majestic beasts didn't interest the small group of weary travelers.

Overhead the sun, Mootin shined down on them, its yellow red light warming in the short days and sorely missed in the often too long nights. There was a time that it was said men walked beneath a yellow sun that was untainted with the blood of sinners and that the land was green and safe to travel. Or so it was said amongst the Tirrahn priesthood.

Jolef, a priest from the southern reaches of the continent did not doubt this and had each night sat at the guttering fire fed with Chubb excrement and explained to them the nature of man's plight. He was silent now, they all were. Too preoccupied with trying to not fall amongst the yellow Sarn sea. Though his thoughts would wander, often to scripture, or too days and nights at the abbeys where he would sit among the older clergy and listen to the stories of such places as they sought. Heresy that festered in the land like a rotting wound, and that in removing it they might be marked among the annals of history.

Their lead figure, a guide native to the plains, stopped in his tracks. Sweat beading his brow as he held an arm up, middle finger extended for all to see. His people bore no names normally, such a burden seen as both a weakness and a curse unfit for those truly 'free'.

"All ya fags stop." He hissed, his shaved head shining in the heat, green paint running."We's close now fuckers."

The rest of the party hadn't quite adjusted to the strange way the man from the Northern tribes talked. Indeed, most of his people spoke in a seemingly erratic mish-mash of slurs, curse words and unintelligible gibberish. They listened though, guides like him were hard to come by, more so one that wasn't going to lead them into an ambush.

Jolef whispered from the back, drawing the guides scathing glance. The green colored handprint on his face had faded leaving a sickly tinge over all of the scarred features. The priest by comparison was sunburnt to the point of looking like the red medallion that hung from his neck. It was rare his trade ventured outside of their home nation past the mountains south where the rains and clouds were a near constant companion.

"Knight-fag, tell the priest-fuck he's gun shush up or I cut his balls off." The Guide said his hand falling to his side where one of the short serrated swords the Northern barbarians favored hung.

Luventer, a knight from the free cities shook his head. He had no like of such folk as the Guide, his people and theirs had long been at each others throats. A blood feud that dated back to before there had been nations and continued to this day. The sword upon his back more than once had tasted the blood of the Guide's kinsman, a fact they were both well aware of.

"Jolef," He muttered shifting his heavy pack, the elegant two handed sword that hung off it slapping the back of his legs. "Listen to the whore-son. He's gotten us this far."

The priest fell silent, as he worried away, his nervous fingers rubbing the symbol of his faith, the carved silhouette of one of the great flighted wyrms. The other member of the troupe, a man called Grimaldi had remained silent. He'd come from the Kventeri's lands, a place where the great forest that reached from north to the south was just open enough to survive in and had served as the main source of funding for those involved. Upon his fingers rings glittered in silver and gold constantly twitching in a steady count of the money spent with each step.

Grimaldi shifted around nervously, the Kventri were not people accustomed to the vast open plains and rarely did they leave their great Forest fortresses where the sweeping red-purple boughs could hold entire buildings upon their branches. Even less frequently did they deal with the Southern Cities and their so called valiant knights after The Betrayal, an event that neither side would claim responsibility for.

Looks were exchanged, among the group. None truly trusted the others, motives questioned and truths hidden each step of the way since they had left the gates of great Cadain upon the shores of the ocean Hilmore.

"There, look fuckwits." The Guide muttered gesturing towards a blighted patch of Sarn. Everywhere else was a lush and vibrant saffron, except for a few strides ahead of the quartet. A large patch of the ever constant yellow plant was simply gone. The red clay beneath visibly present for several paces on all sides of what appeared to be a tumbled down pile of stones that only vaguely suggested an entrance. The group stared, eyes locked upon the heap of rubble.

A prayer was muttered by the Guide and priest. Two different tongues twisting as the knight set his pack down and began to don his armor. Before them lay their destination, one of the few places known where demons still stalked the land. A place they had come to expunge from the annals of history. No Chubbs mournful cries could be heard, and overhead no four winged Flirds flew all that surrounded them was the quiet whisper of the sarn in the soft breeze and a vast empty sky. The muted rustle of the packs being undone as the knight gathered his armor to him and priest prepared not only blessed oils but several small clay jars packed with black powder and a wick.

Jolef was the first to break the silence. His whispered prayers filling the still air as he stepped past the Guide and entered the circle of dead soil. For a moment nothing happened. The Sarn stopped its near constant undulations and the very air seemed to hold itself. All that could be heard was Jolef's faint mutterings as he rubbed his thumb upon the red and bronze talisman of his bestial god, the veins beneath his skin rippling with faint color in the light language of his ancestors, the Elcine.

It was in the midst of his last verses they heard it. A wail, a howl that echoed from within the depths of the small pile of stones. The party's collective skin crawled as the air rippled with the sound of a metallic rasp from beneath the ground they stood upon mingling with the strangled prayers to the flighted god of Tirrahn. Jolef's body for a moment grew rigid and then slumped onto the dusty clay.

He came to around a smokey fire that night. The Guide perched closest to it on his toes, so that his shadow was cast far and wide into the starry night. Luventer stood still, having donned the brilliant scarlet armor of his order, the mighty two handed sword still in scabbard held at the ready and his helm fashioned with the fangs from one of the great forest dragons who with the flick of their tail cleaved

men pulled to his furrowed brow. He still bore the scars from the day he had earned the helm. The blade upon him the same. There scarcely went a night he didn't recall the battle; a tumult of bodies of men upon the Cadain gates when the northern tribes united under a single banner and whipped into a frenzy had come south yet again. Soon, he would enter the fray with something much worse. A demon from the death of the last great race of this cursed world. This was his destiny fueled by hubris of his own survival of the near massacre he had survived more than half a decade ago.

Jolef muttered at random, pieces of prayer slipped from his lips one after the other, the burning image of the dead Khahunak, their broken four armed bodies in multitude before his eyes. An image of a shining daemons upon the stone alter, blades wicked and curved fused where their golden hands had been. Mingled within were visions yet to come of bloody screams and faces blanched even beneath green paint and scarlet helm.

The Guide muttered to himself skin the color of clay as the twin moons slowly moved overhead, prayers to the sun god whispered over guttering flames as the merchant silently accounted his costs and payout by firelight, figures and fingers rapidly shifting like the light beneath the guardian forests. The profit had slowly slid closer and closer to the dangerous red where coin could not be recovered. In his mind he saw the lead tipped copper round dancing and falling away into oblivion, his own kinsmen laughing at such a foolish investment.

No one slept that night as the moons hung high overhead and in the distance the sing-song calls of a pack of feathered throat cutters could be heard as they chased down their prey the low howls of pain from a chubb calf following shortly after. Jolef lay still upon the pallet of cut sarn and whispered with his skin to the gods above, the rippling colors weak and muddied not only from his human blood but from the visceral fear that now snaked through his insides. Blues and greens mingled freely with red and yellow and colors unseen to all but him and his ancient deities eyes.

A meager meal of dark red moss-bread and stale water carried from across the mountains where Luventer had started the journey greeted Mootin. Jolef had regained strength and some measure of his wits whilst the Guide had been found to be arguing with Grimaldi over the ever constant matter of coin. As the sun rose once more the silence had descended.

"I tells." The Guide hissed jabbing a bony finger at the Kventri merchant, his voice shrill and frantic. "I tells, this is much money."

Grimaldi was not a small man and towered over the Guide's wiry figure. His broad, dark face glared down at the interloping appendage and brushed it aside with a hand covered in precious metals. His other hand slowly reaching for the dagger set into his waist belt.

"I'll tell you this wretch. I've come all this way, and all I see is a pile of stones." He growled back, dark eyes shaded by the broad brimmed hat he wore. "I've already lost enough money on this and you've got the nerve to try and squeeze a few more rounds from me?"

The Guide shifted nervously from one foot to the other, negotiation was not something he was well versed in and material gains less so. But he saw the merchants hand at the ready and could quickly

grasp that concept.

“Tells.” He began scratching himself and spitting at the ground. Trying to grasp at words seldom used.”Tells there's, there's rounds. Lots of shine in there.”

Luventer and Jolef remained silent as they continued their morning meal. Grimaldi had done this time and again. Chastising them each in turn for wasting his precious money before finally relenting and continuing on with the journey. Seemingly forgetting he had willingly entered this venture as a way to overcome his self-induced debt to the tree-princes. It was now as much a daily ritual as it was for the Guide to yell at the sky and curse the heavens Or for Jolef to praise them in equal measure. But today, something was different there was a spark, a glimmer of intelligence that the Guide had found somewhere in the night that urged him to make them stay in the cursed place, a spark fueled by dreams of red light and silvered godlings.

“I gets.” He began pointing back at the barren patch of earth and stones. “I gets from there some shine shit. You fucks stay?”

Luvetner and Jolef had no choice in the matter. It was not profit they sought but the adherence to religious duty. Grimaldi nodded, his perhaps only true vice getting the best of him.

The Guide gave the merchant a crooked smile, a mess of broken and yellowed teeth showing before he turned back towards the pile of cursed stones. He muttered foul phrases as he mustered his will to venture forwards and set foot into the circle of deadened earth. He could feel it there, the demon, the Formori which with its misshapen form lurked in the darkness, where Mootin could not see and strike it down, and yet forward he had to go.

One bare foot after another he ventured closer, the outsiders eyes glued as he drew nearer and nearer to the center. With his right hand, its pinky missing and a gold and sapphire ring from the islands of Intlin shining he lifted the stone that sealed the proper entrance within. It took both hands, the stone unnaturally warm and pulsing to some unknown beat. The guide groaned as he hefted the weighty bulk off to the side and felt the rush of warm stale air from within reach out to him. The cloying sweet stench of decay reaching out from all those eons ago to remind him why his people had forbidden ventures to such places.

Carefully he lowered himself in, the drop to the floor below barely his own short height. The tunnel however quickly grew to easily twice that the stone work older than man on this world and intact and a warm dry breath of something ahead brushing past his cheek. Below the surface only darkness reigned; but, for a brief second the Guide had sworn he'd seen four glowing embers staring back at him. Slowly he walked towards into the gaping maw where a dead races alter had stood. Each footstep echoing back as he found his way towards the red light that filled his mind.

In the following hours Luventer remained silent and unmoving, Helm clad visage locked upon where the Guide had entered into the depths below. Spite filling his body and locking him to where he stood. Such was the hate that poured into him and yet, his body tensed and ready to spring into action. Nothing made a noise in the cool day and only the sound of the clinking of Grimaldi's meticulous counting and Jolefs whispered prayers to his strange god could be heard easily.

It was, when the sun reached its zenith they heard the Guide, screams that howled for minutes on end. Animal sounds that made Grimaldi's stalwart masque break out with a cold sweat and Luventer

swallow his hate and pride and choose to act. Something his forefathers had never been able to do.

His armor rattled, the padded vest beneath sweat soaked as he charged forward, the two handed blade passed down to him from his father's father's father in hand. He leaped blindly downward into the pit. Grimaldi looked on astounded, the coins in his hands falling onto the ground. as Jolef screamed in warning his skin brilliant scarlet in the elder language visible even in the bright daylight.

The Guide felt the blade cut him. It had to be a blade, sharp and wicked that caught him in the leg, severing the strings that pulled the body like puppets. He clutched at the red stone, shaped and beating like a tumorous heart. He knew death was upon him, an ignoble one whilst he bore a name instead of pure and blessed anonymity.

Luventer landed with all the grace of a tortolo upon the stone floor. Heavy armor clanging and clamoring as he rolled and readied his blade for whatever fiend might come. His breath caught at the sight of the Guide and his attacker. The scrawny wretch of humanity, missing fingers and toes and teeth looked on with his pale, paint streaked face with terror and pain. Behind rose the daemon, the formori a misshapen silver monstrosity from the time before men.

Great limbs as long as a mans holding an arming sword folded on themselves ending in wickedly curved blades. It's head canted to one side and utterly smooth save for four red embers filled with malice looked towards him. Its body, pitted and scarred with corrosion held a red heart, misshapen as its owner that pulsed with a sickly crimson light. All clad in metallic skin that glimmered in the slow pulsating half light cast by the heart and stone.

Luventer moved the sword to block. This was instinct, the first motion, the only motion known to his order he could stop. It was that which followed which would be the greater challenge. The fiend leapt over the barbarian and brought its wicked blades down from above. The block was perfect. A memory ingrained into his body since he could hold a hand and a half sword.

The Guide praised and cursed the Mootin as the demon abated its pursuit and went after the knight, selfishness and the dream of coin overcoming fear and the agonising pain in his leg. The flash of metal sent sparks flying as he desperately crawled towards the shaft of light that led to the outside. The initial onslaught followed him as he slunk past the fight his leg dead weight as the knight was forced closer and closer to the wall and in equal measures closer to death.

“Knight-fag!” The Guide hissed lobbing himself along the floor, the blood-colored stone in hand.” Run, fuck-fool run! Can't win, can't win!”

The ungodly thing knew no mortal limits. Luventer had come here knowing this but, he also was aware of at least one weakness. The open sky, the blessed realm of the tirrahn god and the Mootin. The second and third strike were easily read, his blade dancing to meet them even as he saw the sub-human guide flee clutching some bauble it had found. Blind by fear and seeing only a place to escape too his body floundering as his leg bled freely and wouldn't move properly. HE stood once more upon the walls of blood stained Caidain and was facing the hordes of the north.

Outside, the priest and merchant listened, ears straining. Luventer, a survivor of one of the most bitter battles of the mountainous south and northern tribes and indeed a swordsman of some renown

had been handpicked for the task by both. Though the priest had brought a precaution should a mortal opponent truly be no match. Neither would join the fray one from fear, the other from duty.

There was only a fraction of a moment Luventer broke his concentration and he paid for it. The first wicked claw, serrated like the barbarian's swords sliced along his chest, a wicked cut that left a gouge in his armor and drew bright red blood, a flesh wound. The second, a sharp spike harmlessly clanked against the armor, retracted by some strange spring like muscle.

Luventer feigned retreating, letting the demon think it'd won and perhaps indeed it nearly had. Their blades dancing as he tried to bring all his attention to bear not just on his blade but where his body was in relation to the narrow tunnel-way. A dance of steel cast in red light from a demon's heart. The Fanged helm of the Screaming wyrms of his homeland firm upon his brow as he fought against what no other of his austere order and indeed perhaps no man had survived. He could feel the warmth of the sky upon his back as neared closer and closer to the wall, he had to be careful now.

The breath in the knight's chest left him. A wheeling kick hard as a battering ram sent him sprawling against the wall, inside he could feel something crack and break. His ribs no doubt flying landed with a clatter and into the sunlight defenseless, pinned to the ground under his semiconscious body was the Guide squirming desperately to get away. From the shadows they could see the burning ember eyes and hellish heart of the silvered monster.

The Guide beneath, a worm trapped. Struggling he hurled the red stone up and out of the depths and up into the sunlit air; his obligation upheld and his name stripped once more to nothing. For a few brief moments it caught the sun in a way that filled the tunnel with light the color of blood before sailing out of view. On top of him the knight groaned as he feebly reached for his blade only for it to be knocked away with what could only be perceived as contempt by the unholy entity.

Jolef didn't move as he heard Luventer scream stoicism and indeed a lack of certain human emotions reminded him of his duty, he prayed though, that the savage might find solace with the gods, his voice a whisper in the soft breeze. Animal howls that came from the earth below, sounds no man should have been able to make. High pitched and strangled noises that carried far into the distance of the flat, empty lands. Grimaldi even gave pause to his ceaseless counting and grew pale, hands trembling so that the fat rings clicked and clanked together. Neither had moved to retrieve the stone they had seen fly up and out of the charnel pit their fellows had foolishly entered.

They were enraptured by the sounds of the tortures their comrades were forced to endure sweat beading on Grimaldi's forehead even as the priest wept in the light language. For a day they listened as Luventer and then the Guide were savaged until both in their own way begged or sought mercy from whatever living horror they were forced to endure. Jolef staggered to his feet as the sun on the second day began to rise, and from beneath the strangled sounds of a human being crying for mercy sounded. Clutching the amulet of his faith he marched to the bags they'd carried all the way here. Legs stiff as he moved towards the odd containers that he had brought and prepared their fuses.

Stumbling he carried them to the fire, the fuses sparking as he carefully lit them and whispered prayers not just of mercy but of forgiveness. In a daze he walked towards the entrance the slow, hissing

burn the only sound Grimaldi could make out as he watched Jolef drew closer and closer before finally falling into the pit. Dust erupted from the hole a few moments later and somewhere beneath the merchant a sound like grinding steel filled the air for the briefest moment. Grimaldi watched the bauble go flying once more, landing upon the ground at his feet as small stones and dirt followed. He made no motion at first to grab it. Still trying to grasp what he had witnessed the coins of his trade sitting plainly upon the ground around him, scattered.

They didn't carry the weight of names. One of the many nomadic tribes that had been present since man had first set foot upon the world that was guided by the half-seeing sun Mootin. They had wandered and had never borne names except only in times of need or when forced upon them as one among their number had recently done. They were anonymity, a nation with no name. As they were they found a named man upon the Sarn's yellow sea clutching at a stone like a tumorous heart and mad with fever dreams of silver demons. A name carried on his tongue, Grimaldi.